Troublemakers: The construction of 'troubled families' as a social problem, by Stephen Crossley, Policy Press, 2018, 224 pp., £24.99 (Paperback), ISBN 978-1447334743.

Having read Crossley's previous book *In Their Place: The Imagined Geographies of Poverty* (2017), I was certainly delighted to be afforded the opportunity to get to grips with the title under review here, particularly as it explores a social programme about which, as an Irish academic, I was only superficially informed. As it happens, I also feel I owe a debt of gratitude to Crossley's aforementioned text. Having similar research interests, I had, by the time I came across Crossley's work, read to saturation in that particular yet still broad idiom and, as a result, *'In Their Place*' felt like just another book that possessed the dubious distinction of being a 'must read'. However, upon delving into the title, any sense of chore-like reading fell away as Crossley managed to bring a sense of freshness to what, in recent years in the UK at least, has become a well-trodden path. Needless to say then, the bar had been set quite high.

In *Troublemakers*, Crossley doesn't disappoint and delivers a *tour de force* of 'public sociology' that neatly and confidently eviscerates the 'Troubled Families' social programme, introduced by the British Government in 2011, which was undoubtedly ideologically charged and necessarily stigmatising from its inception. After appraising the reader of what to expect in a useful introductory chapter, Crossley moves on to examine the intellectual heritage of the 'Troubled Families' programme, paying particular attention to the deeply problematic notion of the 'underclass' along with the varied and dubious exponents thereof. From here he moves to elucidate the more recent political context from which the 'Troubled Families' programme emerged and in doing so illustrates the particular ideological pedigree, which ultimately rests upon a politics of blame and an insistent problematisation of already disadvantaged groups, underpinning the 'Troubled Families' programme. He then traces the continuing evolution of the programme across a number of phases both intended and complete. At every turn, Crossley

exposes the troubling problems which lie at the heart of 'Troubled Families' as a social policy. From the misreporting, half-truths and outright falsehoods concerning the supposed 'success' of the policy through to the planned and continued perseverance with measures that have, by now, been demonstrably shown not to work, Crossley, with notable epistemic integrity, exposes opportunistic politicking in favour of rigour and accuracy. He continues to do this consistently in the remaining chapters. Firstly by exposing that which lies at the rotten core of neoliberal statecraft, perhaps most pointedly characterised by the retrenchment of traditional welfare state measures in favour of a 'responsibilisation' or social 'deficit' model of state intervention, and latterly by drawing on original research that takes a 'street level' view. Here, in particular, Crossley illustrates the unwillingness of local authorities to 'buy into' the official policy line, instead favouring adaptation with a view to making the programme work at a local, and ultimately more humanistic and realistic, level. In concluding, Crossley delivers a damning indictment of the 'Troubled Families' programme which suggests that if a behavioural deficit exists anywhere, it lies with those in positions of considerable public and political power, rather than those already marginalised and excluded groups. Though not fully explored in the book, the notion of 'researching up' or of 'upstream shaming' in order to address, and indeed attack, the top-down production of stigma is something that perhaps bears further scrutiny from the academic community at large, particularly if efforts at 'muckraking' are to ultimately prove effective.

From a community development perspective, the 'Troubled Families' programme revolves around a familiar model of family intervention. It supposedly aims to 'turn around' troubled families via a 'whole family' approach which relies upon a key worker gaining access to and subsequently working with families to address why they have the problems they have. The emphasis is on behaviour and personal responsibility with virtually no attention paid to the structural deficits that may be afflicting the families' concerned. Opportunities for genuine

community development, where the key purpose is to build communities based on justice, equality and mutual respect, do not in fact appear to 'trouble' the 'Troubled Families' programme and this is evidenced by Crossley's observation that the family intervention model borne out here bears little to no resemblance to previous, resource-led, models. The fact that many of the 'Troubled Families' so categorised are very often not aware of the label that has been foisted upon them in the first place appears to be the one, albeit accidental, saving grace of the policy, preventing the damaging and stigmatising effects such labels can potentially have on individuals, families and ultimately communities.

A further particular strength of Crossley's work, and one which perhaps gets less comment than it generally should in the realm of academic literature, is the strength and style of the writing. Crossley writes cogently and fluidly, his prose style is engaging and entertaining, yet the work retains a standard of considerable academic nuance. This, with some notable exceptions (see Oliver and Barnes, 2012; Wacquant, 2009 for examples), is something not always present in academic work and so, having managed it, Crossley deserves to be commended.

More than this however, 'Troublemakers' ultimately represents a work of considerable importance. The 'Troubled Families' programme undoubtedly represents an ongoing failure of politics and policy, and one which has thus far made no attempt to address the real and underlying causes of social alienation, abjection and disfranchisement. Instead, it has favoured the ideology of blame over substance and the dissemination of falsehoods over facts. The public face of the programme is largely characterised by the continuing propagation of the 'stigmatising sound-bite' that has come to dominate popular and political discourses in the UK, thus facilitating the production of stigma and social divisiveness, under the guise of community engagement. Crossley exposes this and more with aplomb. His work, therefore, undoubtedly sits comfortably within the modern canon of sociological literature of this type alongside that

of Tyler (2013) Patrick (2017) and others. '*Troublemakers*' undoubtedly deserves to be widely read and is to be highly recommended to anyone with an interest in community development, sociology, social policy or other cognate disciplines.

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